

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 3019

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 16, 2006

Title: An act relating to chief financial officers in charter counties.

Brief Description: Clarifying the role of a chief financial officer in a charter county.

Sponsors: Representatives Haigh, Alexander, Dunshee and B. Sullivan.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/08/06, 97-1.

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/16/06 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kastama, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Fairley, Haugen, Kline, McCaslin, Mulliken and Pridemore.

Staff: Cindy Fazio (786-7405)

Background: The state Constitution allows for two forms of county government, the commission form and the "home rule" charter form. The non-charter counties are governed by a board of county commissioners. A board of county commissioners shares administrative and some legislative functions with other independently elected county officials, including an auditor, clerk, treasurer, sheriff, assessor, and coroner. Other independently elected county officials and court officers include the county prosecuting attorney and the judges of the superior court.

A county that adopts a "home rule" charter allows the voters to create their own form of county government, though subject to specified constitutional requirements. Counties that adopt charters may appoint officers to perform the various governmental functions that are performed by elected officials in those counties that use the commission form of governance. Furthermore, a charter county is free to create titles and prescribe duties for county officers that are different from those required of counties that follow the commission form. Six counties have adopted home rule charters: Clallam, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Whatcom, and San Juan.

In many charter counties, the duties traditionally associated with the county auditor are performed by an official designated as the "chief financial officer." In order to accommodate this difference in the titles used by the two types of counties, several state statutes relating to the powers and responsibilities of a county auditor refer to the "county auditor or the chief financial officer."

Summary of Bill: The parallel duties of county auditors and financial officers as ex officio deputy state auditors are clarified. The term "financial officer" applies to the holder of that office as designated in a charter county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This is an auditor's request bill. The committee has heard it before and I hope it moves forward. The legislation clarifies the auditor's responsibility in a charter county. The title of these positions has been debated. Financial officer is a designation, not a title. In charter counties, it is a designated person; in non-charter counties, it is the county auditor. This bill has passed the house three years running. The bill is a product of negotiation with the county commissioners and the Washington Association of Counties. Everyone is on board; the bill just doesn't get to the floor.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Representative Kathy Haigh, Sponsor; Suzanne Sinclair, Island County Auditor; Doug Cochrane, State Auditor's Office; Mike Garrison, Skammania County Auditor, Washington Association of Counties.